

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS

Joselyn Oigbokie

individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated,

Plaintiff(s)

-v.-

Recovery Management Services, Inc.;

and John Does 1-25.

Defendant(s).

Case No: 1:21-cv-2626

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff Joselyn Oigbokie ("Plaintiff"), brings this Class Action Complaint by and through her attorneys, Stein Saks, PLLC, against Defendant Recovery Management Services, Inc. ("RMS"), individually and on behalf of a class of all others similarly situated, pursuant to Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, based upon information and belief of Plaintiff's counsel, except for allegations specifically pertaining to Plaintiff, which are based upon Plaintiff's personal knowledge.

INTRODUCTION/PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

1. The Fair Debt Collection Practices Act ("FDCPA" or "Act") was enacted in response to the "abundant evidence of the use of abusive, deceptive, and unfair debt collection practices by many debt collectors." 15 U.S.C. §1692(a). The Act was promulgated because of the concern that "abusive debt collection practices contribute to the number of personal bankruptcies, to material instability, to the loss of jobs, and to invasions of individual privacy." *Id.* It concluded that "existing laws...[we]re inadequate to protect consumers," and that "the effective collection of debts" does not require "misrepresentation or other abusive debt collection practices." 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692(b) & (c).

2. The purpose of the Act was not only to eliminate abusive debt collection practices, but also to ensure "that those debt collectors who refrain from using abusive debt collection practices

are not competitively disadvantaged.” *Id.* § 1692(e). After determining that the existing consumer protection laws were inadequate, *Id.* § 1692(b), the Act gave consumers a private cause of action against debt collectors who fail to comply with the Act. *Id.* § 1692k.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

3. The Court has jurisdiction over this class action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331 and 15 U.S.C. § 1692 et. seq. The Court has pendent jurisdiction over state law claims, if any, in this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1337(a).

4. Venue is proper in this judicial district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331(b)(2), as the acts and transactions occurred here, Plaintiff resides here, and Defendant transacts business here.

NATURE OF THE ACTION

5. Plaintiff brings this class action on behalf of a class of consumers under § 1692 et seq. of Title 15 of the United States Code, also known as the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act ("FDCPA"), and

6. Plaintiff is seeking damages and declaratory relief.

PARTIES

7. Plaintiff is a resident of the State of Illinois, county of Cook.

8. Defendant RMS is a “debt collector” as the phrase is defined in 15 U.S.C. § 1692(a)(6) and used in the FDCPA with an address at 151 N Franklin Street, Suite 2500, Chicago, IL 60606.

9. Upon information and belief, Defendant RMS is a company that uses the mail, telephone, and facsimile and regularly engages in business the principal purpose of which is to attempt to collect debts alleged to be due to itself or another.

10. John Does 1-25, are fictitious names of individuals and businesses alleged for the purpose of substituting names of Defendants whose identities will be disclosed in discovery and should be made parties to this action.

CLASS ALLEGATIONS

11. Plaintiff brings this claim on behalf of the following class, pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a) and 23(b)(3).

12. The Class consists of all individuals:

- a. with addresses in the State of Illinois;
- b. to whom Defendant RMS sent an initial letter;
- c. attempting to collect a consumer debt;
- d. in two sub-classes:
 - i. where the letter states that even if the recipient pays the total amount due an adjustment may be necessary after RMS receives the check; or
 - ii. where the letter states an amount owed and then states that said amount consists of principal and miscellaneous fees but does not state that interest is included; and
- e. which letter was sent on or after a date one (1) year prior to the filing of this action and on or before a date twenty-one (21) days after the filing of this action.

13. The identities of all class members are readily ascertainable from the records of Defendant and those companies and entities on whose behalf it attempts to collect and/or has purchased debts.

14. Excluded from the Plaintiff Class are the Defendant and all officers, members, partners, managers, directors and employees of the Defendant and their respective immediate families, and legal counsel for all parties to this action, and all members of their immediate families.

15. There are questions of law and fact common to the Plaintiff Class, which common issues predominate over any issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is whether the Defendant's written communications to consumers, in the form attached as Exhibit A, violate 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e, 1692f, and 1692g.

16. The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the class members, as all are based upon the same facts and legal theories. The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the Plaintiff Class defined in this complaint. The Plaintiff has retained counsel with experience in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions, and neither the Plaintiff nor her attorneys have any interests, which might cause them not to vigorously pursue this action.

17. This action has been brought, and may properly be maintained, as a class action pursuant to the provisions of Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure because there is a well-defined community interest in the litigation:

- a. **Numerosity:** The Plaintiff is informed and believes, and on that basis alleges, that the Plaintiff Class defined above is so numerous that joinder of all members would be impractical.
- b. **Common Questions Predominate:** Common questions of law and fact exist as to all members of the Plaintiff Class and those questions predominate over any questions or issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is whether the Defendant's written communications to consumers, in the form **attached as Exhibit A** violate 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e, 1692f, and 1692g.

c. **Typicality:** The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the class members.

The Plaintiff and all members of the Plaintiff Class have claims arising out of the Defendant's common uniform course of conduct complained of herein.

d. **Adequacy:** The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the class members insofar as Plaintiff has no interests that are adverse to the absent class members. The Plaintiff is committed to vigorously litigating this matter. Plaintiff has also retained counsel experienced in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions. Neither the Plaintiff nor her counsel have any interests which might cause them not to vigorously pursue the instant class action lawsuit.

e. **Superiority:** A class action is superior to the other available means for the fair and efficient adjudication of this controversy because individual joinder of all members would be impracticable. Class action treatment will permit a large number of similarly situated persons to prosecute their common claims in a single forum efficiently and without unnecessary duplication of effort and expense that individual actions would engender.

18. Certification of a class under Rule 23(b)(3) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure is also appropriate in that the questions of law and fact common to members of the Plaintiff Class predominate over any questions affecting an individual member, and a class action is superior to other available methods for the fair and efficient adjudication of the controversy.

19. Depending on the outcome of further investigation and discovery, Plaintiff may, at the time of class certification motion, seek to certify a class(es) only as to particular issues pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(c)(4).

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

20. Plaintiff repeats the above allegations as if set forth here.
21. Some time prior to September 30, 2020, Plaintiff allegedly incurred an obligation to non-party Roosevelt University.
22. This alleged debt was incurred as a financial obligation that was primarily for personal, family or household purposes and is therefore a "debt" as that term is defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a (5).
23. Roosevelt University is a "creditor" as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a (4).
24. According to the letter received by Plaintiff, Roosevelt University referred the account to RMS to collect the alleged debt.
25. Defendant RMS collects and attempts to collect debts incurred or alleged to have been incurred for personal, family or household purposes on behalf of itself or other creditors using the United States Postal Services, telephone and internet.

Violation - September 30, 2020 Collection Letter

26. On or about September 30, 2020, Defendant RMS sent Plaintiff an initial collection letter. A true and accurate copy of this letter is attached as Exhibit A.
27. Defendant disputes the amount alleged as owed in the letter.
28. The letter states a total balance of \$5,178.87.
29. It further states that the balance consists of principal of \$3,884.15 and Collection Costs of 1,294.72.
30. Upon information and belief, the "Principal" of \$3,884.15 actually includes both principal and interest and/or fees.

31. Stating that this amount only includes the principal is therefore false and/or deceptive.

32. The \$1,294.72 amount listed for “Collection Costs” is also egregious and unconscionable.

33. It represents a 33.33% charge.

34. All that Defendant had done at this point was mail a letter.

35. It is unconscionable to add such an exorbitant collection fee.

36. Moreover, Plaintiff is unsure if even the relevant contracts, if any, permit such an unfair collection fee.

37. Plaintiff was therefore unable to evaluate how much is truly being alleged as the correct balance, is being misled as to the total owed, and cannot properly evaluate the demand for payment or how to address it.

38. Defendant’s actions caused Plaintiff to suspect there was fraud or questionable practices involved with this collection.

39. Because of Defendant’s actions, Plaintiff expended time, money, and effort in determining the proper course of action.

40. In addition, Plaintiff suffered emotional harm due to Defendants’ improper acts.

41. These violations by Defendant were knowing, willful, negligent and/or intentional, and Defendant did not maintain procedures reasonably adapted to avoid any such violations.

42. Defendants’ collection efforts with respect to this alleged debt from Plaintiff caused Plaintiff to suffer concrete and particularized harm, inter alia, because the FDCPA provides Plaintiff with the legally protected right to be not to be misled or treated unfairly with respect to any action for the collection of any consumer debt.

43. Defendants' deceptive, misleading and unfair representations with respect to its collection efforts were material misrepresentations that affected and frustrated Plaintiff's ability to intelligently respond to Defendants' collection efforts because Plaintiff could not adequately respond to Defendants' demand for payment of this debt.

44. Defendants' actions created an appreciable risk to Plaintiff of being unable to properly respond or handle Defendants' debt collection.

45. Plaintiff was confused and misled to her detriment by the statements in the dunning letter, and relied on the contents of the letter to her detriment.

46. Plaintiff would have pursued a different course of action were it not for Defendant's statutory violations.

47. As a result of Defendant's deceptive, misleading and unfair debt collection practices, Plaintiff has been damaged.

COUNT I
VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT
15 U.S.C. §1692e *et seq.*

48. Plaintiff repeats the above allegations as if set forth here.

49. Defendant's debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692e.

50. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692e, a debt collector may not use any false, deceptive, or misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of any debt.

51. Defendant violated said section by:

- a. falsely representing the character, amount or legal status of the debt in violation of §1692e (2);
- b. threatening to take an action that cannot legally be taken or that it did not intend to take in violation of § 1692e (5); and

c. Using a false representation or deceptive means to collect or attempt to collect a debt in violation of § 1692e (10).

52. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's conduct violated Section 1692e et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

COUNT II
VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT
15 U.S.C. §1692f *et seq.*

53. Plaintiff repeats the above allegations as if set forth here.

54. Alternatively, Defendant's debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692f.

55. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692f, a debt collector may not use any unfair or unconscionable means in connection with the collection of any debt.

56. Defendant violated this section by

- a. Unfairly representing the character, amount or legal status of the debt;
- b. threatening to take an action that cannot legally be taken or that it did not intend to take; and
- c. Using unfair representations or means to attempt to collect a debt.

57. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's conduct violated Section 1692f et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

COUNT III
VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT
15 U.S.C. §1692g *et seq.*

58. Plaintiff repeats the above allegations as if set forth here.

59. Defendant's debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692g.

60. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692g, within five days of an initial communication, a debt collector must send written notice of the amount of the debt.

61. Defendant violated this section by failing to properly state the amount of the debt owed.

62. In addition, the implied statement that the amount of the debt may increase overshadows the § 1692g notice and time language and coerces the consumer not to exert her rights under the FDCPA.

63. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's conduct violated Section 1692g et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

DEMAND FOR TRIAL BY JURY

64. Pursuant to Rule 38 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Plaintiff hereby requests a trial by jury on all issues so triable.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff Joselyn Oigbokie, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated, demands judgment from Defendant RMS, as follows:

- a) Declaring that this action is properly maintainable as a Class Action and certifying Plaintiff as Class representative, and Yaakov Saks, Esq., as Class Counsel;
- b) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class statutory damages;
- c) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class actual damages;

- d) Awarding Plaintiff costs of this Action, including reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses;
- e) Awarding pre-judgment interest and post-judgment interest; and
- f) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

Dated: May 14, 2021

Respectfully submitted,

Stein Saks, PLLC

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